

# 5000 West

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## Dedication ceremony Wednesday

The \$13 million, enhanced use, Milwaukee VA Regional Office will have its official dedication at 11 a.m. on Wednesday, August 25. Regional Office Director Jon Baker will host the ceremony in the front parking lot of the building (5400 W. National Avenue). The program is open to all.

Many dignitaries from the surrounding communities and the VA are anticipated to be in attendance.

John S. Hill will speak for the building developer, Colliers Keenan, Inc.

From Washington, DC, Under Secretary for Benefits Daniel L. Cooper and Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Gordon H. Mansfield will speak on behalf of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The ceremony will include a ribbon cutting and the unveiling of the dedication plaque to be placed at the entrance. The Milwaukee American Legion Band will provide music.



Director Jon Baker cranks up the VA flag.

**History being made – *quietly*.** It was shortly after 9:30 a.m. on opening day, July 6, Assistant Director Brad Mayes, Staff Assistant John Kuehl, aided by Bill Wagar and John Wesner, raised the flags in front of the new Regional Office. The RO site is the only one known in Wisconsin to be flying the Department of Veterans Affairs flag; most VA flags are relegated to corners in VA lobbies or offices.

## One VA

The VA is divided into three administrations. Milwaukee is unique in that the National Cemetery Administration (Wood National Cemetery), Veterans Health Administration (Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center) and the Veterans Benefits Administration (Milwaukee Regional Office) are located at the same site. The property (today about 196 acres) was first occupied by the Soldiers Home, now the Medical Center, in 1867.

The role of the Medical Center and the Wood National Cemetery is obvious in the

name. The Regional Office may not be.

The Milwaukee Regional Office staff, under the Veterans Benefits Administration, provide Wisconsin's veteran community with monetary benefits for service-connected disability, non-service connected pension, survivor benefits, burial benefits and vocational rehabilitation. The Milwaukee RO is one of 56 operated by the VA nationwide.

In addition, the RO is a Pension Center that provides disability and death pension to

those living in an eleven state area that includes Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, and Tennessee.

Annual payments for benefits administered by the Milwaukee RO total some \$1 billion dollars.

The RO telephone numbers remain the same, but the address has changed: 5400 West National Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53214.





# Completing the circle with style

by John Kuehl  
Staff Assistant VARO

The building is brand new, but the history of the Milwaukee VA Regional Office can be traced to 1919. At that time, the Federal Board for Vocational Education and the Bureau of War Risk Insurance established a sub-office at 128 Grand Avenue (now Wisconsin) in downtown Milwaukee. Other sub-offices were established in Madison, Eau Claire, and Green Bay.

With the end of World War I, the number of veterans increased markedly causing President Harding to appoint a commission to study the organization and administration of veterans' benefits. The result was the creation of the U.S. Veterans Bureau in 1921. In November of 1924, the Milwaukee sub-office became the Veterans Bureau Regional Office. It was initially located at 120 N. Broadway, and later relocated to 621 N. Second Street.

On July 3, 1930, Congress passed a law authorizing the President to "consolidate and coordinate governmental activities affecting war veterans." Under this authority, President Hoover established the Veterans Administration by Executive Order dated July 21, 1930. As a result, the activities that comprised the Veterans Bureau downtown were combined with the VA Hospital and Soldiers Home and relocated to a three-story

building fronting National Avenue. This building was torn down in the early 1960's to make room for the new hospital and adjoining parking lot.

Because of the expanding workload following World War II,



**This is the main entrance to the "old" Milwaukee VA Regional Office when it was located in building 6 built in 1879. The site was the "temporary" location to the RO staff for 21 years.**

the Regional Office was separated from the VA Hospital at Wood (as it was then called) and moved to 342 N. Water Street in downtown Milwaukee. Additional sub-regional offices were established in Superior, Wausau, LaCrosse, and Green Bay. Public contact offices were located in thirteen other Wisconsin cities and at VA hospitals. The Milwaukee Regional Office employment reached a high of 1,781 in March of 1947; today that number is 260.

In the early 1980's, the General Services Administration, owner of the Water Street building, announced that it would be sold. The Regional Office had the option of relocating to the new Federal Building on Wisconsin Avenue. Rather than do so, it was decided to move back to the Medical Center campus which was more fiscally responsible. This was accomplished in October of 1983.

The staff made their home in a historic building on the north side of the VA campus, built for returning Civil War soldiers, until July 6 of this year. On that day, the regional office staff began their commitment to service in the new, enhanced use building just to the west of the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center.

Enhanced use simply means that a developer owns the building for a given number of years, after which, it reverts back to VA ownership. Enhanced use has made construction possible that otherwise would not happen under current federal budget constraints. The building was completed in about a year's time.

The Milwaukee Regional Office has come full circle. This time to a new state-of-the-art facility built specifically for the veterans seeking benefits. Today it's back to a three-story building on National Avenue where it was some 70 years ago. However, with all the changes, the legacy of service continues to grow.



**5000 West**

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The community relations office publishes *5000 West* bi-weekly as a channel of communication for employees, volunteers, patients and friends. *5000 West* is committed to enhancing the image of the Medical Center and its employees and volunteers through information, recognition and entertainment.

Articles of interest are welcome. The editor reserves the right to use and edit contributed stories. Submission deadline is two days prior to publication. Your comments are encouraged and should be directed to editor (00Z) 5000 West, VA Medical Center, Milwaukee, WI 53295; telephone (414) 382-5363 or (888) 469-6614, extension 45363 or e-mail john.zewiske@med.va.gov

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